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**LEESVILLE ROAD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 23, 2017) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Nevada Mareno of Leesville Road High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Mareno is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Leesville Road High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the racecourse, distinguishes Mareno as North Carolina's best high school girls cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January/February, Mareno joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg, Orland Park, Ill.), Megan Goethals (2009-10, Rochester, Rochester Hills, Mich.), Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Prep., San Luis Obispo, Calif.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-7 senior won the NCHSAA Class 4A state meet this past season with a time of 17:27.62, breaking the tape 16.64 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Pride to a fifth-place finish as a team. Mareno won the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 17:21.70, then took silver at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships with a season-best time of 17:08.32. She captured bronze at the FLCCC as a junior. A two-time Foot Locker All-American, Mareno won every race she entered this past fall until the national championships and clocked the state's fastest 5K time by a prep girl, which ranked No. 19 nationally.

Mareno has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics and the Leesville Road Track and Field Camp. "Few runners nationally race better in big meets than Nevada Mareno and, in 2016, she reminded the entire country of her impressive tenacity, determination and will to excel, especially when the stakes were the highest," said Erik Boal, editor of DyeStat.com. "Her results at the state, regional and national levels were a testament to her resolve and mental toughness."

Mareno has maintained a 5.04 weighted GPA in the classroom on a 4.0 scale. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at Stanford University this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Two-time winner Mareno joins Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Nevada Elly Henes (2014-15, Green Hope High School), Kalya Montgomery (2013-14, Mount Tabor High School), Megan Sullivan (2012-13, Broughton High School), Sammy George (2011-12, Millbrook High School), Darby Middlebrook (2010-11, Watauga High School), Wesley Frazier (2009-10, Ravenscroft School), and Adrienne Soo (2008-09 & 2007-08, Durham Academy) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Mareno will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit www.gatorade.com/poy.

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